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A LETTER REGARDING THE QUEEN'S RANGERS

Contributed and Edited by E. Alfred Jones, M. A.,
F. R. Hist. S.

The following letter written to General Sir Henry Clinton, Commander-in-Chief of the British army in North America, by Alexander Innes, Inspector General of the Provincial Forces, is preserved in the Public Record Office in London, and is now published for the first time. (C. O. 5/98, p. 129.)

This Loyalist Regiment is of interest to Virginians from the fact that more than one Virginian was an officer in it.

The writer of this letter had been secretary to Lord William Campbell, Governor of South Carolina, before his appointment in January 1777 as Inspector General of the Provincial (or Loyalist) Forces in North America. In 1779 he was given the command of the South Carolina Royalists. (*Hist. MSS. Comm. Report on the American MSS. in the Royal Institution*, Vols. I-4.).

Colonel Rudolphus Ritzema, a New York loyalist who had deserted from the American service, describes Colonel Innes as "a man, whose haughty and supercilious conduct has estranged more minds from His Majesty and the British Govt. than perhaps all the other blunders in the conduct of the American war put together. This every American officer, not under a national bias, will avouch." (Ritzema's petition to William Pitt, in the Chatham Papers, Bundle 220.).

The signature of Colonel Alexander Innes is appended to a petition shortly after 1791 from officers of the late British-American Regiments on half-pay in England, offering their military services upon the prospect of war with France. To the mortification of these officers, their services could only be accepted upon condition that they joined the British Army as

ensigns, in total disregard of their rank in the Loyalist corps in the American War of Independence. (F. O. 4/1.)

A Roll of Officers, including the Queen's Rangers, of the Loyalist Regiments in the American War of Independence, 1775-1783, compiled from original muster rolls by the Rev. W. O. Raymond, has been published in the *Collections of the New Brunswick Historical Society*, No. 5, 1904.

Sir,

In consequence of your Excellency's Commands, I have examined the different papers transmitted by Lord George Germain one of His Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State, relative to the complaints of the dismiss'd Officers of the Queens Rangers; and I hope I shall be able fully to explain that affair, and the necessity Sir William Howe was under to adopt that measure.

On my appointment to the Office I now have the honor to hold in January 1777, I found the Provincial Corps in very great confusion and disorder; Several persons to whom Warrants had been granted to raise Corps had greatly abused the confidence that had been placed on them, by issuing Warrants to very improper persons as inferior Officers; the consequence of which was, that numberless abuses had taken place, and among many others, Negroes, Mulattos, Indians, Sailors & Rebel Prisoners were enlisted, to the disgrace and ruin of the Provincial Service. My first duty was to represent those enormities to The Commander in Chief, who empowered me to discharge all improper persons that had been enlisted;— Strict orders were given to prevent any such practices in future, and it was particularly directed that the strictest Justice should be done to the Non-Commission'd Officers and Privates, with regard to their Bounty and Pay, numberless well founded complaints having been made by many of them on that subject.

In reporting upon the state of the different Corps as they fell under my inspection, it was with much concern that my duty obliged me to represent to Sir William Howe¹ the wretched

¹ Sir William Howe, Commander-in-chief of the British Army in North America, before the appointment of his successor, Sir Henry Clinton.

situation of the Queens Rangers, then Commanded by Lieu^t Rogers². M^r Rogers had introduced into this Corps a number of persons very improper to hold any Commission, and their conduct in a thousand instances was so flagrant, that I could not hesitate to tell the General, that untill a thorough reformation took place he could expect no service from that Battalion, which in the course of the Winter had been reduced to one fifth of its original strength, principally by Desertion; As an instance I find that on my first inspection, the effective strength of the Four Companies Commanded by the Complainants, consisted of Fifty One Rank & File. I was fortunate enough to find in that Regiment several Gentlemen, particularly Major Grymes,³ and Captain Armstrong,⁴ now Major of the Regiment; those officers had in general originally belonged to Lord Dunmore's Virginia Corps of the same Name, and they were so exceedingly ashamed of the behavior and conduct of the other Officers, that I was told they had it in contemplation to wait on The Commander in Chief, resign their Commissions, and serve as Volunteers in any Corps in the Army rather than remain where they were. On this representation the General determined that L^t Colonel Rogers should retire on his Pay, and gave the Command of the Corps to Lieut Col^l French,⁵ then Major of the 22nd Regiment, who accepted it on the express condition of being permitted to New-model the Regiment, and to recommend such Officers only as were deserving that honor. The Corps therefore was to all intents and purposes dissolved, and a New one formed. Lieu^t Colonel French made out a List

² Robert Rogers, of Rockingham County, New Hampshire, organized in 1755 a company of scouts for service against the French in North America. From this corps was developed the famous Rangers, variously known as Rogers's Rangers and the Queen's Rangers. His more celebrated brother was Major James Rogers, a conspicuous figure in the annals of the Colonial Wars in America and in the American War of Independence. Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Rogers died in 1784, unmarried.

³ Major John Randolph Grymes (see additional note.)

⁴ Major Richard Armstrong was appointed Captain in the Queen's Rangers in August 1776 and was promoted Major on 25 October 1778 or 1 November 1778. (Ind: 5604.)

⁵ Christopher French served in the 22nd Foot in different ranks from ensign from 1744 to 24 June 1775, when he was promoted Major. On 3 October 1777 he became Lieut.-Colonel of the 52nd Foot and retired in 1778.

of Officers for the New Corps, in which he included as many of the Old Officers as he thought fit; These recommendations were approved of by the General, and the gallantry and good conduct uniformly shown by the Queens Rangers on every occasion do's great honor to Lieu^t Colonel French's choice. That Gentleman did not remain long enough with the Regiment to compleat the reformation he had begun, but his resignation was Voluntary and was accepted with reluctance. Major Wemyss⁶ and Lieu^t Colonel Simcoe⁷ have Commanded that Battalion since, and their Merit and Services are too well known to need my testimony. The tenderness and humanity of Sir William Howe to the dismiss'd Officers was strongly mark'd, he ordered them three months full Pay, and repeatedly desired they might be recommended for such Commissions as they were qualified for, when vacancies happened; most of them have been provided for; M^r Frazer might have been appointed a Lieutenant which I thought really equal to his merit, but he declined it, and as to the other three Captains, I should have been highly unworthy of the Commission I now hold, had I been capable of introducing them into any Provincial Corps in the Character of Gentlemen.

I beg leave to transmit to your Excellency a Copy of my report with the General's Orders on the Margin, which is the Method I have always followed in receiving the Commands of The Commander in Chief relative to Provincial Matters.

Altho' all the facts I have represented are too well known in this Army to admit of doubt, yet I beg leave to convey also to your Excellency the sentiments of the only old Officers of that Corps, who served with the Complainants which were drawn up on their hearing of those complaints and sent me from Staten Island this morning.

I must beg leave to add that I find the Attorney employed by

⁶ Major James Wemyss resigned his command of the Queen's Rangers on 15 October 1777.

⁷ Major John Graves Simcoe succeeded Major James Wemyss in command of the Regiment in December 1777. His *Military Journal* is a valuable contribution to the history of the American Revolutionary War from the British side.

these people is one Grant,* who stiles himself Captain in the Prince of Wales's Corps. I beg your Excellency to acquaint Lord George Germain that Grant is no Officer but a notorious imposter and common cheat; should his Lordship wish to know any more of his history, M^r Robinson^o Secretary to the Treasury, and M^r Richard Atkinson can give his Lordship full information.

I will not trouble your Excellency any longer on this subject, but only beg leave to say that during a space of almost three years that I have filled this office, I have been a witness and can give the fullest testimony that every possible and reasonable encouragement has been given by The Commander in Chief to the Provincial Service. The Officers when they have fail'd in their engagements from unavoidable and unfortunate circumstances, have been always treated with attention and humanity, and when they have exposed themselves to Censure, with remarkable lenity; As a proof of this I take the liberty of transmitting a list of Seconded Officers now receiving a Bounty equal to half Pay, very few of whom have any other pretensions but their distress; and many of the Provincial Corps are now so weak that to make them really serviceable it will be necessary to reduce the number of Corps by incorporating the weakest with others, which will of course swell the list of Seconded Officers, altho' it will be a great saving to Government.

I have the honor to be with great respect

Sir

Your Excellency's

Most Obedient &

Most Humble Serv^t

[Signed] Alex: Innes

Insp^r Gen^l P. Forces.

New York 9th Novm^r

1779.

His Excellency

Sir Henry Clinton, K. B.

Gen^l & Commander in Chief

&c., &c., &c.

* No officers of the name of Grant are in the roll of the Prince of Wales's American Volunteers.

^o John Robinson, Secretary to the Treasury.

VIRGINIANS IN THE QUEEN'S RANGERS

One of the most distinguished Virginians in this Regiment was John Saunders, who was born on 1 June 1753 in Princess Anne County. He was the only son of Jonathan and Elizabeth Saunders, grandson of Captain John Saunders of that county, and great-grandson of the Rev. Jonathan Saunders, of Lynnhaven Parish in the same county. According to Sabine's *Biographies of the American Loyalists*, this young Virginian was descended from an English royalist family which had emigrated to Virginia. At the age of 22 he accepted, against the entreaties of his friends and neighbours, a commission as Captain in the Queen's Own Loyal Virginia Regiment, from the Earl of Dunmore, Governor of the colony, on 16 November 1775. This Regiment, the only Loyalist corps raised in Virginia, was commanded by Colonel Jacob Ellegood, of Rosehall on Lynnhaven River, a brother-in-law and trustee of the estate of Captain Saunders during the last six years of his minority. (A. O. 13/33.).

The studied contempt of this young and ardent loyalist for the revolutionary party in his county aroused such ill-feeling that he and two other loyalists, Benjamin Dingley Gray and Captain Mitchell Phillips, were not only regarded as inimical to the liberties of America, but their neighbours were recommended to cease from supplying them with necessaries of all kinds, including food. (Force, *American Archives*, Series IV, Vol. 2, pp. 76-7.).

The Queen's Own Loyal Virginian Regiment was incorporated, some time after its defeat at Great Bridge, with the First American Regiment, better known later as the Queen's Rangers. In the dragoons of this corps John Saunders received a commission as Captain on 25 November 1776. From that date until the end of the year 1780 he served in every action of the regiment, to the applause of his superior officers, and was severely wounded at the Battle of the Brandywine, where his brother-in-law, Major John McKay, (commissioned Captain in the infantry of the same regiment on 26 November 1776), was also wounded.

Lieutenant Colonel John Graves Simcoe, commanding officer of the Queen's Rangers from December 1777, treated Captain Saunders as his confidential friend and described him as an officer of "great address and determination" and as one who had performed gallant and active services in the war. (Simcoe's *Military Journal*). An original certificate of Simcoe states that from a sense of the merit and eminent services of Captain Saunders he did his utmost to procure him the rank of Major. (A. O. 13/133.).

This loyalist accompanied General Leslie on the expedition to Virginia in October 1780 and commanded the cavalry detachment of his regiment. From Virginia he proceeded to South Carolina, where he was on duty until April 1782, when he sailed for New York and there took the command of the remnant of his regiment saved from the surrender at Yorktown. (A. O. 13/79.). The Regiment of Queen's Rangers was placed on the British establishment on 25 December 1782 and at the peace Captain Saunders was placed on half-pay.

Having studied law in his youth in Virginia he was admitted to the Middle Temple and in 1787 he was called to the English bar. Three years later he married Ariana Margaretta Jekyll Chalmers, daughter of Colonel James Chalmers, of the Maryland Loyalists, then an American refugee in England, and his wife, Ariana Margaretta, daughter of John Jekyll, the younger, sometime Collector of Customs at Boston, Massachusetts, and his wife, Margaret Shippen, of Philadelphia, the marriage having taken place at St. Luke's Church, Chelsea, on 16 February 1790. (W. O. 42/S4.). Immediately after his marriage Captain Saunders sailed for New Brunswick, where he had been appointed, earlier in the year, fourth puisne Judge, through the influence of his friend, Colonel John Graves Simcoe. In 1822 he was raised to the dignity of Chief Justice of New Brunswick, as well as that of President of the Legislative Council. Colonel Jacob Ellegood (the owner of a family Bible recording the date of birth of Captain Saunders) and Major John McKay, both brothers-in-law of Captain Saunders, settled in York county, New Brunswick, on half-pay.

This distinguished loyalist soldier and lawyer was conspicu-

ous for his enthusiasm in making preparations for the defence of his adopted country against threatened invasions by the French in 1798 and by the Americans in 1808.

His only son, John Simcoe Saunders (named after Colonel Simcoe) was educated at Worcester College, Oxford, and was called to the English bar by Lincoln's Inn. He became an eminent lawyer in New Brunswick and held the important offices of Advocate General, Surveyor General and Lieutenant Governor, as well as President of the Legislative Council. His name is remembered in legal circles as the author of *The Law of Pleading and Evidence in Civil Actions*.

John Saunders died on 24 May 1834, at Fredericton, New Brunswick, and his wife died there in 1845, at the age of 77. The arms of Saunders, both father and son, are illustrated in *Acadiensis*, Vol. II, pp. 189-197.

(F. O. 4/1; Lawrence and Stockton, *The Judges of New Brunswick and Their Times*, pp. 100-1, 111, 116, 141, 274-5, 352, 423-4, 440, 509; Ind: 5604; Ex inform. Mr. Charles McIntosh.)

A second Virginian officer in this Loyalist Regiment was John Randolph Grymes, a member of a well-known Virginian family and son of Philip Grymes, of Brandon, Middlesex County, Receiver General and member of the Colonial Council. He was born about 1746. The Earl of Dunmore, Governor of Virginia, was much elated at the acquisition of Grymes to the loyalist side and wrote to Lord George Germain in warm words of him. He was appointed Major in 1777 and resigned to the great regret of Colonel John Graves Simcoe, whose confidence he had won by extricating the corps from a very disadvantageous situation at the Battle of the Brandywine, by a bold and decisive exertion. (Simcoe, *Military Journal*). In February 1783 Major Grymes appealed for a civil or military appointment under the Crown and stated that he would be glad to have an apartment for himself and his family in any of the Royal Palaces in England, and thereby save house rent. (A. O. 12/99, f. 18.). He was on half-pay as Major from 24 June 1786. (Ind: 5605).

Another Virginian officer in the Queen's Rangers was a

scion of a prominent family, in the person of Christopher Robinson, who left William and Mary College and joined the regiment during the invasion of Virginia by the British troops and was commissioned ensign in the infantry on 26 June 1781. (Ind: 5604.).

A fourth Virginian was Stair Agnew, son of the Rev. John Agnew, a determined loyalist and minister of Suffolk Parish in Nansemond county, who was appointed Chaplain in the Queen's Rangers on 1 January 1778 (Ind: 5604.). Stair Agnew was commissioned Lieutenant on 27 November 1776 and Captain in the Infantry of this Regiment on 27 September 1777. (Ind: 5604). He was severely wounded at the Battle of the Brandywine. For thirty years he was one of the representatives for York County in the House of Assembly of New Brunswick, where he died in 1821, aged 63. (Lawrence and Stockton, *The Judges of New Brunswick and their Times*, p. 79.)